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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000579

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (HOH/FOOKS); NSC FOR
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KAWC](#) [KJUS](#) [MARR](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA: SREBRENICA "SPECIAL STATUS" SESSION ISSUES
CONCLUSIONS BUT MAKES NO UNILATERAL DECLARATIONS

REF: A. SARAJEVO 556

[B](#). SARAJEVO 456

[C](#). SARAJEVO 362

Classified By: Political Counselor Michael J. Murphy. Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: As a response to the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) finding of genocide in Srebrenica, Srebrenica Municipality Mayor Abdurahman Malkic hosted a meeting on March 12 to discuss proposals that his municipality secede from the Republika Srpska (RS) and receive "special status" as a district under Bosnian state-level authority. Although there were concerns that participants would unilaterally declare secession, attendees heeded the Ambassador and High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schillings' warnings not to take unilateral action. Mayor Malkic instead focused the discussion on necessary socio-economic improvements for the region, but participants still issued a set of conclusions endorsing special status for Srebrenica. Bosniak political leadership, with the exception of Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic, generally took the Ambassador's advice to avoid inflammatory rhetoric. RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik's public response to the meeting was also measured. Unlike his colleagues, Silajdzic made a series of irresponsible comments during the meeting, at one point accusing the West of abandoning Bosniaks. Steering Board Ambassadors (SBA) held an emergency meeting today (March 13) to discuss the meeting and its conclusions and later issued a statement designed to calm the situation. (Full text of statement e-mailed to EUR/SCE Fooks.) We will continue to try to keep a lid on Srebrenica, but it is not clear whether Silajdzic is prepared to behave constructively. He is focused on using Srebrenica as a vehicle for bludgeoning the RS. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (C) On March 12, Srebrenica Mayor Malkic held a meeting to discuss "special status" proposals for Srebrenica. Heeding the warnings of the international community, attendees did not/not make any unilateral decisions to declare "special status" for Srebrenica as previously feared. The majority of the meeting focused on the socio-economic concerns of Srebrenica's citizens, but participants, which included representatives of Bosnian institutions and political party members (primarily Bosniaks), issued 13 main conclusions at the end of the meeting. The most prominent of these is the initiative to give Srebrenica Municipality "district" status "such that it would be excluded from the

jurisdiction of RS institutions and placed under the jurisdiction of state-level institutions." The conclusions called on parliament to enact a law at the state-level to this effect, which would regulate all issues relevant to the organization of legislative, executive and judicial authorities in Srebrenica.

¶3. (C) The participants also concluded that all entity and state institutions are obliged to respect the ICJ's verdict (i.e. that genocide was committed in Srebrenica and that Serbia must bring war criminals to justice.) In addition, the attendees concluded that BiH officials should take immediate action to remove war criminals from police forces and government structures in the RS and to prosecute those listed as war criminals in the Srebrenica Commission Report. Other conclusions called for the adoption of financial programs at the state and entity level that would provide concrete employment, education, health, and social care. The session noted its regret that prominent members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of western governments did not attend, and condemned the absence of RS government officials. Attendees warned that it would hold the international community and local authorities accountable if they did not do everything within their power to prevent a further exodus of Srebrenica citizens. Participants determined that they would meet again in one month to analyze implementation of these initiatives and that all proposals for mass expatriation would be put on hold until that time.

¶4. (C) Embassy contacts who observed the meeting described it as "constructive" but criticized Silajdzic for making incendiary comments. SDA President Sulejman Tihic, SDP President Zlatko Lagumdžija, Croat member of the Tri-Presidency Zeljko Komsic and Malkic made constructive

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contributions to the discussion, both during the meeting and in press statements following it. Silajdzic tried to drive a wedge between Bosniaks and the international community. Although Silajdzic's public statements centered around his disappointment that western diplomats chose not to attend the session, his private comments in the session were much more inflammatory. "The West has always abandoned us, and they did again today," Silajdzic said pointing out that only Islamic diplomats representing Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Palestine and Iran attended the meeting. He added that "if the West hopes to have a dialogue with the Muslim world it should start in Srebrenica." Further criticizing the international community's reaction to the Srebrenica atrocities and the ICJ verdict Silajdzic mused, "if 7000 penguins had been murdered, the world would have reacted more strongly than it has here" and "the international community can no longer avoid drawing a parallel between Auschwitz and Srebrenica."

¶5. (C) Though some RS officials criticized the meeting for undermining Dayton, Dodik's reaction was more measured. Dodik told the press that "it is not a problem to support anything that is legal," indicating that there are legal procedures for constitutional changes for those who believe they deserve special status. He added, however, that RS officials would "energetically confront" initiatives outside the law, and that "any official action would require the approval of the entire presidency, and not just the presence of two of its members," referring to Silajdzic and Komsic who were both present at the meeting.

¶6. (C) According to Mayor Malkic, PM Dodik called him the morning prior to the meeting asking him to maintain order and reject any unilateral attempts to declare special status. Dodik promised Malkic a private meeting in the very near future to discuss investment opportunities in Srebrenica and other issues of concern for the area. (Note: Malkic was quite optimistic that Dodik might support a special status for the municipality, something akin to an enterprise zone. Malkic in particular seeks approval to find investment for

the renovation of Srebrenica's mines and spa which were completely destroyed during the war. He also seeks compensation for lands in the municipality flooded to provide hydroelectric power to neighboring Serbia. End Note.)

17. (C) The Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Steering Board Ambassadors held an emergency session on March 13 to discuss the outcome of the Srebrenica meeting and its response. During the meeting it was agreed that the PIC would issue a statement emphasizing that the ICJ verdict in no way guarantees the granting of "special status" provisions for Srebrenica, but encouraging state and entity authorities to work together to improve the economic, social and political conditions in the municipality. During the meeting, High Representative Schilling reiterated his concerns about the drastic and disconcerting political stalemate present in the nation since the ICJ verdict was handed down.

18. (C) COMMENT: We are trying to keep a lid on tensions over Srebrenica. Prior to the March 12 meeting, the Ambassador spoke with Mayor Malkic as well as with Bosniak political leaders (Tihic, Lagumdzija, Silajdic) and Dodik, warning them to avoid destabilizing moves and rhetoric. Everyone acted on our advice, except Silajdzic, who was, predictably the most reckless in his comments. Nonetheless, the Srebrenica issue has shifted and radicalized the political debate here. Instead of a political dialogue about how to secure Bosnia,s integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions, we now confront a debate over the country,s internal boundaries - a debate Kosovo is increasingly likely to exacerbate. We plan to continue our dialogue with Bosnia,s political leadership and will continue to try and steer discussion toward the economic and social plight of returnees. It is not clear that Silajdzic is prepared to listen, however. He sees in Srebrenica an opportunity to force the international community,s hand on Republika Srpska, provided he pushes hard enough. Unfortunately, he has found a receptive audience among Bosniaks who are angry about the ICJ,s verdict and what they perceive as growing indifference by the international community to their plight. END COMMENT
MCELHANEY